Communication: Print vs. Electronic Media

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Both the electronic media (i.e. radio, television and computers) and the print media (i.e. newsletter, newspapers, magazines and journals) continue to play an effective role in any society (Eyiah). With that said, it is imperative as a classroom teacher to decide which may be the most effective way to communicate with both our students and parents.

Communicating with students and parents is essential to an effective classroom. Without good communication skills, things can easily be misinterpreted or even got lost along the way. Print media is the most basic way of getting information home to the parents of your students and it has been very effective over the years. But, things have changed over the past several years and it might now be easier to effectively communicate with parents using electronic media. Both electronic and print media have their pros and cons.

Print media can simply be defined as newspapers, newsletters, or magazines. Teachers commonly use news letters to keep parents informed of the events and dates of field trips or open house nights. Some may share what the children are doing in the classroom (Jensen). Print media is also an effective way to get a great deal of information into a small space. We may need to mention several things in a note that is going home and putting it into a sheet of paper can help us do so. Students can also help in the creation of newsletters, calendars, or brochures that are being sent home. Children seem to be more motivated when they are working toward something that everyone would be able to view, especially their parents. This would be a great way to incorporate technology into your classroom and engage the students learning. But, we as teachers might find using print media to be effective because we either know of no other way or choose not to know of another way. Teachers have been passing out newsletters and forms to their students probably since the educational system began.

Making copies of newsletters and forms to be sent home can very time consuming and difficult to do over the course of the school day. Not all teachers are blessed with access to an aide to make copies for them. Time is something that is difficult to manage but if it’s managed correctly, we would be able to handle a task as small as running off copies of a letter that has to get home to parents. Print media is also something that is not very eco-friendly. Making too many copies of something always seems to be an occurrence. Recycling is something that, at times, is in the back of the students’ mind when passing out papers. Students often just throw extras in the trash or just take two papers because they are too lazy to recycle them. Another issue with print media could be the use of paper. Imagine having to run off over 1,000 newsletters to be sent home to an entire school district. That in the long run can turn out to be very expensive over the course of a whole year, not to mention the everyday stuff like PTA information, book fair dates, lunch menus, and permission slips that are sent home in just your classroom. With the recent budget cuts something like paper, which we take for granted, could turn out to be a big financial issue. Your students may also be another concern with print media. Students, no matter what their age, can be irresponsible at times and tend to lose those important materials which are to be sent home to their parents. Students are more successful when communication between home and school is established (Berger). In addition, print media is something that is hard to change once you have passed them out. Suppose you put a wrong date or time on a form. It can be very confusing to try to communicate this error with the students, once you have already distributed the forms.

Electronic media, on the other hand, seems to be an excellent way of communicating with parents and students alike. Being able to post homework assignments, classroom news and events, as well as pictures and videos on a classroom website appears to be the new and possibly best way of communicating with parents. Both students and parents would have access to these documents at all times. Your students would not be able to come to you in the morning and use the excuse that they forgot to write down their homework assignment because now it will be posted on the classroom website. You, as the editor of the class website, would also have the ability to change or update information whenever needed. Electronic media is something that is extremely eco-friendly. Being able to post information on a website would be a great way to diminish the use of paper and would certainly be cost effective as well. Students could also take an active role in with the class website. They can work in groups to create newsletters online. Each group could work on a section in the newsletter and when finished, they could post it onto the website. Consequently, students tend to be more effective learners when using modern technology. “Students feel their work could have far reaching effects, which in turn encourages them to put more effort into it” (Karchmer). Putting pictures up of students working in class can be very rewarding to them. They could go home at night and show their parents a science project that they worked on in class that day. You could even post an important video on how to correctly multiply. Students love to use the computer and I believe having more information accessible to both them and their parents is a recipe for success in the classroom.

Of course, you may run into the issue that not all parents and students are well versed in the use of a computer or have access to one. You would have to make sure that both the students and parents have the capability to get online and access this information. One option would be to have a training seminar, on a meet the teacher night, when you could show parents how to access all of the information that would be essential for them to view. On the other hand, not all students may have access to computers at home. This can be a very difficult because those students wouldn’t be getting the same kind of communication, between home and school, as those who do have computers. A major concern, with electronic media, is the fact that posting pictures or information about students can be dangerous. The majority of Americans do have access to online websites and they would be able to view your class website. Posting times and dates when your class is going on a field trip could spell disaster in some situations. A family member may be trying to use a student in your class as a pawn in a family dispute and this information would be very inviting for them. Putting up pictures of your class can be extremely risky as well. There are many people who try to prey on young children and take advantage of them. This would be one perfect opportunity to do so.

Within my fifth grade classroom, I think I would have to find a happy medium between print and electronic media for right now. Both have some great advantages despite some disadvantages. I feel that communicating with parents is necessary and you need to utilize whatever options you have available to do so. Like I mentioned before, students tend to be more successful when there is a link between home and school. As a result, parents tend to take a more active role in their child’s schoolwork when the communication is effective.

References

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